

“THE CHURCH OF THE FIRSTBORN”

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“The general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.”
Hebrews 12:23

PAUL had just been giving a brief description of the great gathering of the children of Israel around mount Sinai, “the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire,” like a huge volcano. He had vividly portrayed “the blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of trumpet, and the voice of words,” and the frightened multitudes standing, trembling, at a distance, and even Moses, their great leader, so alarmed that he cried out, “I exceedingly fear and quake.”

Paul intends that description to teach us the effect that the legal dispensation can produce, it can alarm and condemn, but it cannot save. You who are under the law, you who are trying to win God’s favor by your good works, you who fancy that human merit can bring you salvation, look to the flames which Moses saw, and sink, and tremble, and despair. You who think that you can live as the law requires, and so attain to everlasting life, may well stand shivering and trembling before this almighty though invisible God, whose lightnings blaze before your eyes, and whose voice of thunder must alarm the stoutest heart.

Terrible is the plight of the man who has to depend upon what Sinai can give him, he is wretched in life, he shall be troubled in death, he shall be lost forever in eternity. “By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” “As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse.” “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”

Having given that description of Sinai by way of contrast, Paul now brings out the much more pleasing picture of the Gospel dispensation. Christians also shall have their great assembly, there is a mountain upon which all those who are under grace shall one day gather—a mountain that does not smoke, for it is mount Sion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. There will be words there, but they will be words of sacred song and notes of holy gladness. There may be trumpets there, but they will be the silver trumpets that will proclaim the eternal jubilee. Moses will be there, but no longer fearing and quaking, for when he comes to that mount of God, he will forget all his fears, and rejoice without ceasing in the Lord his God.

Believers are the multitude, whom no man can number, who will assemble upon that glorious mountain to keep the everlasting holy day. Happy indeed shall we be when, by grace, we come to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven, when we shall see that sight which was revealed to John in Patmos—a Lamb standing on the mount Sion, and with Him those who have His Father’s name written on their foreheads, who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes and who are without fault before the throne of God.

The first point to which I am going to draw your attention is *the description given of believers as the church of the firstborn*. Next, I want to remind you of *what is said about their enrolment*, they are written or enrolled (as the marginal reading renders it), in heaven, and then thirdly, I shall have something to say concerning their *great general assembly*, when all the righteous shall be gathered to Christ, to be parted from Him no more forever.

I. To begin then, from our text it seems that BELIEVERS IN CHRIST ARE DESCRIBED AS THE CHURCH OF THE FIRSTBORN.

I shall try to make my remarks, as I utter them, self-examining, so that you and I may question ourselves to see whether we belong to this general assembly.

By the term “firstborn” is often meant, in Scripture, *the most excellent, the chief*. Jesus Christ, because of the excellence of His character, is said to be “the firstborn among many brethren,” “the firstborn of every creature,” “the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He might have the preeminence.” So, although believers are, by nature, the children of wrath, even as others, yet after Christ has renewed them, they become the excellent of the earth in whom should be all our delight.

Point me out a man who makes a profession of religion, but who is a drunkard, and I will tell him at once that his profession is a lie. Show me another who says he is a follower of Christ, although he oppresses the poor, defrauds the laborer of his wages, is a covetous man, who cares only for himself, and shuts up his bowels of compassion from his needy brethren, and I hesitate not to ask, “How dwelleth the love of God in him?”

If the “grace” we profess to have does not make us better than others, the sooner we get rid of it, the better. “What do ye more than others?” was the question of Christ to His disciples. “If ye lend to them, of whom you hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.” Of Christians there is something to be expected that is not to be looked for in others, they profess to be twice born, and to have God dwelling in them, as Paul says to the Corinthians, “Know ye not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”

Christians profess to be heirs of heaven, and members of the mystical body of Christ, so shall they talk and act as the ungodly do, and demean themselves as those do who have never received this new and higher life? God forbid! When divine grace comes, it lifts us up, and keeps us up, and makes us new creatures in Christ Jesus, so that the evil things in which we once delighted we do not so much as name, while anything that is virtuous or of good repute we pant after that we may exhibit it to the praise of His grace who has called us according to the counsel of His own will.

Now, dear friends, you can make this a test by which to try yourselves. What is your life, man? What fruits do you bring forth? If you bring forth thorns, surely you are brambles. If you bear the grapes of Gomorrah, surely you belong to Sodom’s valley. “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” If the stream be foul, what must the fountain be? If the outside of your cup and platter be filthy, what must the inside be? If that which men see of you is foul, how foul must you be where only God can see you! We are none of us better than we seem, but we are all of us far worse than we think. May God rend away every veil which hides us from ourselves, that we may see ourselves even as we are in His sight!

So you see that God’s firstborn are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,” “a peculiar people, zealous of good works,” who seek to adorn the doctrine of God their Savior in all things.

But the term “firstborn” has a second meaning in Scripture. The firstborn, under the old Mosaic economy, were *chosen by God for Himself*. When He smote the firstborn of Egypt, He set apart for Himself all the firstborn of Israel. He might have selected the youngest of the family, or the second, if He had chosen to do so, for God does as He wills, and “He giveth not account of any of his matters.” You may ask Him why He does this or that, but He deigns not to answer your inquisitive or impertinent inquiries. He is not disturbed by your questions. He never gives the reasons why He chooses any man unto salvation.

That He does choose them, is clear enough from Scripture, so clear that even such an unbeliever as Bolingbroke said to Mr. Whitefield one day, “Let it be taken for granted that the Bible is true, then no other doctrine but Calvinism can be true, for the Bible teaches it from beginning to end.” Certainly, if men’s minds were not willfully perverted, they must read this truth in such words as these, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.” And what says the Scripture when the sinner begins to cavil at this truth? “Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?”

Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump, to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?”

It is a fact that God has ordained unto eternal life a multitude that no man can number, and just as the firstborn among the Jews were typically elect, so the saints become saints as the result of the divine decree passed long before the earth was created. When as yet this world and the sun and moon and stars slept in the mind of God, like unborn forests in an acorn cup, even then had the Almighty written the names of all His chosen in the Lamb’s book of life, and fixed the place, the date, the very moment when they should be born, and when they should be born a second time, should come to Christ, and so find salvation and everlasting life.

This doctrine is far from palatable to men, but inasmuch as it glorifies God, and makes man to be but as a grasshopper before the Eternal, we delight in it, and humbly bow before the Sovereign Disposer of all events, and say, “It is the LORD; let Him do what seemeth him good.”

Then, thirdly, the firstborn were *inheritors of great privileges*—of which we cannot just now speak particularly, but will do so further on, and *they became so entirely by birth*. The rights of the firstborn lay only in his primogeniture—not in his stature, not in his comeliness or beauty, not in his mental capacity, not even in his moral virtues. If he was as lame as Mephibosheth, yet, if he was the firstborn, he could not be disinherited, or if, instead of having the towering stature of a Saul, he was as diminutive as Zacchaeus, yet, if he was the firstborn, neither his parents nor all the courts of law could reverse the rights of primogeniture.

So, beloved, all those who are believers in Christ, who are known to men by their excellence of character while God knows them by having chosen them by His grace, are in time brought to realize their privileges through the new birth which is wrought in them by the Holy Spirit. If we are born only once, we must die twice, but if we are born twice, we die but once, and after that one death which is not really death, we enter into life eternal.

Regeneration makes us actually the children of God, just as adoption makes us virtually the children of God. By regeneration, we become really and truly heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, and our right to heaven, to all the blessings of the covenant of grace, and to the promises of God, arises from this new and heavenly birth.

Heaven is the inheritance of the children of God, not a possession purchased by their money, or won by any deeds that they have done. This heritage is the birthright of all who have been born again, born from above, so the question for every one of us to ask is, “have I experienced this new birth?” “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” “That which is born of the flesh is flesh,” and only flesh, “and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” And as heaven and all the other blessings of the covenant are spiritual, we cannot possess them until we are “born of the Spirit.”

The firstborn, then, had certain rights because of their birth. And the firstborn, spiritually, have certain rights because of their new birth. May the Lord help you all to make sure work here! I pray you, do not take it for granted that all is well with your soul, nor treat this question as though it were of little account. On the fact of your being born again, or not being born again, must hang your everlasting destiny. Live and die unregenerate, and woe unutterable will be your eternal portion. Pass from death unto life, and all the glories of the paradise of God become yours by an entail which death and the devil himself cannot break.

Have you passed from death unto life? How can you tell that? “By their fruits ye shall know them,” is our Lord’s own test. Do you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? Are you trusting alone in Him? These are vital questions, and if you can truly say—

*“My hope is built on nothing less
Then Jesu’s blood and righteousness,”—*

and if that hope is accompanied by the faith which works by love, and purifies the heart and life, then you are one of the children of God, and in that fact you may well “rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.”

Now fourthly, *upon the firstborn, more than upon any others, God was pleased to multiply the types of redemption*, in order to show to us very plainly that the heirs of heaven are a redeemed people. First of all, the great majority of the firstborn were redeemed by blood. In the dark and dreadful night, the destroying angel is let loose, with noiseless wings, and with a sharp sword that never misses its mark, he is speeding from house to house throughout all the land of Egypt, and from the firstborn of Pharaoh upon the throne to the firstborn of the slave women behind the mill, they fall dead, and Egypt’s wail goes up to heaven in an exceedingly bitter and piercing cry.

But throughout the houses of the Israelites a different scene is being witnessed. The doors are shut, a roasted lamb lies upon the table, and men and women stand around it, girt as for a journey, and with their staves in their hands, and they eat in haste. There is a firstborn child in his mother’s arms, or a firstborn male who is grown up, yet they show no sign of trepidation, though it is well known that, on that night, the firstborn are to die.

Why are they so calm? Had you been present, an hour or two ago, you would have seen that the father, when he slew the lamb, drained the warm lifeblood into a bowl, and as his children gathered about him, he said to them, “Come, follow me,” and taking with him a bunch of hyssop, he went to the outside of his door, and smote the lintel till it was crimsoned with the blood of the lamb, and then he sprinkled the posts on either side so that the blood-mark was all about the door. “And now,” says he, “my children, we are safe, for when God sees the blood, He will pass over us, and our firstborn will not be slain, the blood will make them secure.”

In like manner we who are the firstborn of God are saved by the blood of Jesus. Can you, friend, by faith say, “My confidence is in that blood alone”? Has it been applied to your heart and conscience? Has it spoken peace to your soul? Does it cleanse you from all sin? Do you now rejoice that there is no condemnation to you, as you are in Christ Jesus, and He has endured the whole of the wrath divine that was your due because of your sin?

But lest we should not learn this great truth by one type, God has given us another. In the course of two years, over twenty-two thousand children were born to that large population, and these had not been redeemed by the blood of the paschal lambs, for they were not then in being, so another method was adopted, a Levite was to stand in the place of each firstborn male child, and God accepted the Levite, and allowed the child to remain in his father’s house.

Here was a symbol of the great truth of substitution, but the privileges which appertained to some of the Jewish firstborn in the type belong to all the spiritual firstborn children of God. Christ is the Levite who stands before God in our room, and place, and stead, and who there ministers for us, and honors His Father’s law, and fulfils its every jot and tittle on our behalf.

There were two hundred seventy-three firstborn Jewish children for whom no Levite substitute could be found, so five shekels per head had to be paid to Aaron and his sons as redemption money for them, and in like manner, the divine plan of redemption is very rightly set forth by the apostle Peter when he says, “Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

Put these three things together—redemption by blood, redemption by substitution, and redemption by purchase—and you will then have a very clear idea of what atonement in reference to the firstborn means. Any one of the three will be sufficient for the enlightened saint, but the whole together will reflect a beautiful light upon the cross of Christ, and in that light we may clearly see how He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, and brought in everlasting redemption for all His chosen.

Let each one of us put these questions to himself or herself, “Am I redeemed with the precious blood of Christ? Did He stand as Substitute and Surety for me? Am I bought with the price that He paid for

His people on the Cross? For, if not, I cannot be numbered among the firstborn, for all the firstborn must be redeemed in this way.”

Our time flies so quickly that I am afraid the other two divisions of my discourse will have to suffer, but I must remind you, as I promised to do, that *the firstborn, having been redeemed, had very special privileges*. First, they had a double portion of their father’s goods. Hence Elisha, who was, in the prophetic sense, the firstborn of Elijah, pleaded with him as his spiritual son, “I pray thee, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.” Now, God is good to all men, and His tender mercies are over all His works, but His special favor is reserved for the called, and chosen, and faithful ones whom He has redeemed.

The firstborn also had the privilege of priesthood in the old patriarchal times, and every true child of God is made a king and a priest unto God, to offer daily, spiritual and acceptable sacrifices through Jesus Christ. The firstborn was, in many respects, a ruler over the whole household, and Christ, the great Firstborn, is the supreme Ruler over His church, and we, in and through Him, are made rulers over many things, and He bids us ascend the throne and reign with Him as God’s firstborn, kings and priests unto Him forever.

II. Now secondly, and but very briefly, let us inquire, WHAT IS MEANT BY THE ENROLLMENT OF THE FIRSTBORN?

Moses had to set down the names of the Jewish firstborn, and we find that right down to the apostles’ age, there were some who were very busy about what Paul calls “endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith,” but dear friends, there is an enrollment about which we should be greatly concerned. There are certain names written in the Lamb’s book of life, and it should be to you and to me a matter of solemn interest to inquire if our names are written there.

Is your name, is my name, inscribed upon that secret, sacred roll of the elect of God? We cannot scale the heights of heaven to search the pages of that sealed book, nor can we discover the secrets that the Most High has recorded there. It is impossible for us to read our names there, yet there are certain evidences by which we can tell whether they are or are not there.

First of all, *do you think they are there?* Are there not many here who must truthfully say, “No, we have no reason to think they are”? When the muster-roll of our troops is called, if you are there you can hear the names, and the men’s answers, “John So-and-so,” “Here, sir,” “Thomas——,” “Here, sir,” “Here, sir,” “Here, sir,” and so it goes all down the ranks.

Now, suppose it could be possible for an angel to read from this pulpit the muster-roll of the redeemed, do you think that he would read your name, and that you would be able to answer, “Here, sir”? “No,” you say, “unless I tell a willful falsehood, I dare not say that I think my name is in the Lamb’s book of life.” Well then, if your own hearts condemn you, remember that God is greater than your hearts, and knows all things, so how much more must He condemn you!

Possibly there are some who say, “We hope our names are written there.” So I ask you, dear friends, *are you like those whose names undoubtedly are inscribed there?* Have you the faith of Abraham, or something like it? Do you desire to have such holiness as Paul craved? When you read the record of a good man’s life, do you feel that your life is in conformity with his? For character, *character*, CHARACTER must, after all, be the great ground of judgment, and if your life be not like the life of the saints, how can you hope to find your name recorded where their names are written?

Again, *all the elect have their names written beneath the name of their Lord, the Lamb*, so, are you trusting in Christ? Are you resting on Him? Is your life linked with His? Do you feel that there is a bond, that cannot be snapped, which binds you and Christ together so that no one and nothing that can possibly happen shall be able to separate you from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus your Lord? Very well then, if this is the case with you, rest assured that your name is in that book, but “without Christ,” you are without hope, separated from Him, it is certain that your name is not written in heaven, as one of “the general assembly and church of the firstborn.”

I ask you another question, *are you really a child of God?* Can you say to Him, “Abba, Father”? Is God your Father? Have you learned to trust Him as His children trust Him, and to love Him as His children love Him? Do you depend wholly upon Him? Do you seek to submit yourself entirely to His will, and to walk in His way? For, if you are not a child of God at all, certainly you are not one of His firstborn.

I must also ask, *Have you passed from death unto life?* Has there ever been a vital change in you, such a change as can only be wrought by the Holy Spirit? I do not mean such a change as some silly people talk of seeing, sometimes, when a man is dying. There may have been no sign of grace whatever in the man, yet someone said, “I saw such a change come over him, his face looked so different.” Very likely it did, but it is not a change of face that is needed, but a change of heart, it is no physical change, but a mental, moral, spiritual, divine change that is wrought in regeneration.

Let not any one of you be satisfied unless you have unquestionable evidence that this change has been wrought in you by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit, for unless you are born again, your name will not be found written upon the roll of God’s firstborn.

Now, in closing, let me just remind you that to all these firstborn of God, whose names are written in heaven, the day is coming when they shall be assembled around the throne of God in glory. What a meeting that will be! There shall not be one unholy person there, for they shall all have been washed white in the blood of the Lamb. How happy they will all be! There shall be no tear in any eye, nor a groan in any spirit, nor a single note of sorrow on any tongue, for the days of their mourning shall be ended forever.

How united an assembly it will be! There shall be no heresy, no schism, no discord, no coldness of heart, they shall all love even as they have been loved. What a vast assembly it will be, and when ten thousand times ten thousand meet together there, what a shout of sacred joy it shall be when they uplift hallelujah upon hallelujah! John says, “I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters.”

You may have heard the sea roar in the fullness of its strength, possibly you have heard the mighty Atlantic Ocean booming on the shore when lashed to fury by the storm. Such is to be the grandeur of the singing before the throne of God in the general assembly and church of the firstborn, only it is not merely to be like the voice of one water, but of many waters—oceans piled upon oceans, the Atlantic upon the Pacific, and the Arctic, and the Antarctic, and all other oceans piled upon these, and such shall be the music of the saints, such shall be the song of the blessed when they see their Father’s face without a veil between, and pour out their vast volume of praise “as the voice of many waters.”

Let each one of us ask himself or herself, “Shall I be there?” If anyone says, “I fear that I shall not be there,” let him cry mightily unto the Most High to pull him out of the horrible pit, and to set his feet upon the rock, and to establish his goings. Sinner, you will either be there or in that dreadful place where the wailings shall be more terrible than the cry of men in a battle or the shrieks of women in a massacre. You will either be up there in glory or else down there where darkness, death, and long despair sit on their thrones of woe.

Fly, sinner, fly away to Christ! His wounds, like clefts in the rock, are open to the doves that need a shelter. Fly, sinner, fly! The avenger of blood pursues you, I hear the sound of his feet close behind you, and he is about to strike you dead, but the city of refuge is near at hand, standing with open gates ready to welcome you. Fly, sinner, fly! “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.” “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

To believe on Jesus is to trust Him, to be baptized is to be immersed in water upon profession of that faith. I dare not alter my Master’s commission, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned.” There is no other alternative. Turn or burn, believe and be saved, or disbelieve and be lost. May God, in His mercy, make the choice for you sinner, this very hour, and lead you in the way everlasting, and unto Father, Son, and Holy Spirit shall be the glory forever and ever! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

HEBREWS 12

After giving a long list of the heroes of faith, the apostle adds—

Verses 1-3. *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand on the throne of God. For consider him—*[See sermon #1073, A Honeycomb].

Look to Him, look at Him, study Him, know all you can about Him, meditate upon Him,—

3-4. *That endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.*

It has not come to that yet with any of you who are now here, you have not shed your yet blood for Christ, for these are not martyr days, so can you be wearied and faint? If you run with the footmen, and they weary you, how will you contend with horses? We ought to be ashamed of ourselves if we grow weary in a race that is so easy compared with that of the men and women who laid down their lives for Christ's sake.

5. *And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as to children, My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:*

Both these states are wrong, either to think nothing of chastisement or else to faint under it, we are not to fall into either evil, but to keep the golden mean between them.

6. *For whom the Lord loveth—*

The Greek word is a strong one, and means, “whom the Lord tenderly loveth”—

6. *He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*

Everyone does not receive the same measure of chastisement, and he that has the largest share of the love of God will feel the most of His chastising hand. Are you not willing to take that position, and to be among the Lord's tenderly loved ones?

7. *If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?*

God had one Son without sin, but He never had a son without suffering, and the Son who was without sin was the “Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.”

8. *But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.*

If you are without chastisement, you may bear the name of sons, but you are not really so, you are mere professors.

9. *Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?*

Should we not give Him reverence when we are chastened, instead of murmuring and complaining against Him, thus calling Him to account at our judgment seat? Oh, yes, let us be in willing subjection to Him, and the more willingly subject we are, the less painful will the chastisement be. Our bitterest sorrow will be found at the root of our self-will, and when our self-will is gone, the bitterness of our sorrow will be past.

10. *For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.*

Is there no way for us to “be partakers of his holiness” but through chastening? It would seem so from the wording of this verse. The Lord, as our loving Father, makes use of the rod that He may make us to be truly holy.

11. *Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous,—*

How could it be? It would lose the very nature of chastening if there were joy in it.

11. *But grievous: nevertheless afterward*—[See sermon #528, Chastisement—Now and Afterwards].

These are truly blessed words, “nevertheless afterward”—

11-13. *It yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.* [See sermon #2854, Lame Sheep].

Come, children of God, do not be despondent because of your tribulations. You are in a race, so run, even while you are smarting from your chastisements, still run, and keep on running until you win the prize.

14. *Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:* [See sermon #2902, Holiness Demanded].

The holy God can only be seen by holy eyes. He must make us like Himself before we can see Him.

15. *Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God;*

Seeming to have grace, and yet not really having it.

15. *Lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;* [See sermon #940, The Winnowing Fan].

Sin is a bitter thing and a defiling thing, and unless we look diligently, it will grow in our hearts like the weeds grow in our gardens after a heavy rain, it will spring up before we are aware of it.

16. *Lest there be any fornicator,—*

Fornication was far too common in the early church, but it was not thought to be sin by the great mass of the heathen, but oh, what a defiling sin it is!

16. *Or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.*

He was thus guilty of spiritual fornication, preferring his meat to his Maker, thinking more of one morsel of meat than of his birthright.

17. *For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.*

He could not get his father to change his mind concerning Jacob, on the contrary, he said, “I have blessed him; yea, and he shall be blessed.” His many tears availed not, they were not repenting tears, but only selfish ones. He did not repent that he had bartered his birthright for a mess of pottage, he regretted that he had lost the blessing, that was all.

18-21. *For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (for they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)*

We have not come to that mount of terror, for we are not under the law, but under grace, we have come to a very different place from that.

22-24. *But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.* [See sermons #211, The Voice of the Blood of Christ, #708, The Blood of Able and the Blood of Jesus, and #1888 and #1889, The Blood of Sprinkling].

We are come to that blood, and it is that blood which has made such a change in us. We may rejoice together now, and we ought to do so, if we are all one in Christ Jesus.

25-29. *See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we*

receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire.

Not “God out of Christ,” as some say, but God in Christ, God anyhow is a consuming fire, and we should each one pray, “Consuming fire, refining fire, go through my heart and purge me of all that can be consumed! Holy Spirit, drive out of me all that can be shaken and removed, that only Your abiding kingdom may remain in me, and Yours shall be the praise and the glory forever! Amen.”

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